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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Seventeenth Session (First Part)

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 476TH MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on
Thursday, 1 September 1977, at 5.40 p.m.

President: Mr. de ALWIS (Sri Lanka)

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OTHER PARTICULAR MATTERS IN THE FIELD OF TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT (agenda item 6) (TD/B/AC.21/2, TD/B/AC.21/3, A/32/126) (continued)

PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF:

(i) SPECIAL MEASURES IN FAVOUR OF THE LEAST DEVELOPED AMONG THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

(ii) SPECIFIC ACTION RELATED TO THE PARTICULAR NEEDS AND PROBLEMS OF ISLAND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

(iii) SPECIFIC ACTION RELATED TO THE PARTICULAR NEEDS AND PROBLEMS OF LAND-LOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

1. Mr. SEVRE (France) said that the countries members of Group B were particularly interested in special measures in favour of the least developed among the developing countries. They were anxious to assist those countries to attain their development objectives as rapidly as possible, and in recent years, many Group B countries had adopted special measures in their favour. Official development assistance was increasingly taking the form of donations. Group B countries had also given increased support to the financial flows from the international finance institutions to the least developed countries. The Group B countries were convinced that more effective ways would be found in the future to enable the least advanced countries to meet the needs arising from their exceptionally difficult situation.

2. Group B regretted that it had not been possible to hold the special meeting provided for in Conference resolution 98 (IV), paragraph 35, in the spring of 1977. It was to be hoped that it could be convened in the near future. The Group B countries would participate fully and constructively.

3. It was gratifying to note that the meeting of the Ad hoc Group of Experts to study improved methods for expanding the exports of the least developed countries had been fixed for January 1978. A number of Group B countries were prepared to participate in the meeting, which was to report to the Intergovernmental Group on Least Developed Countries.

4. Mr. ROSWICK (Belgium), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman on behalf of the European Economic Community, said that the Community had always favoured special measures for the least advanced countries and specific measures for the island and land-locked developing countries. Activities in favour of those three categories had been the subject of a declaration by the Conference on International Economic Co-operation in Paris, with a follow-up at the eighth special session of the Board and the sixty-third session of the Economic and Social Council.

5. The subject had also been dealt with in a Community review of policies of development co-operation for 1971-1976, submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for consideration by the General Assembly at its forthcoming session.

6. Mr. PANT (Officer-in-charge, Research Division) said that a full progress report on the implementation of special measures in favour of the least developed countries was being prepared by the secretariat and would be submitted to the Intergovernmental Group on Least Developed Countries in 1978. The UNCTAD report now before the Board for its information (TD/B/AC.21/2) reviewed the economic situation of the least developed countries and made suggestions for international policy measures in favour of them.

7. He pointed out that only a very few of the least developed countries had been able to achieve significant rates of growth over the past few years. During the period 1970-1975, the least developed countries as a group had recorded an annual growth in real per capita product of only 0.9 per cent; eight had recorded an actual decline, and only three had exceeded the modest growth target of at least 3.5 per cent for the poorest developing countries under the strategy for the second United Nations Development Decade.

8. The dependence of the least developed countries on external assistance had risen from 71 per cent of their total foreign exchange availabilities during 1965-1969 to 56 per cent in 1975. At the same time, their per capita import capacity had remained virtually unchanged at about $29 as compared with a growth from $70 to $87 over the decade for all other developing countries. It was therefore clear that greater efforts were required at the international level in order to alleviate the economic situation of the least developed countries.

9. The report prepared by the secretariat strongly emphasized the inadequacy of present flows of assistance to the least developed countries and discussed a number of policy issues and related measures, such as assistance requirements for accelerated progress, and means of improving assistance policies and procedures of both donors and recipients in the light of the special problems and needs of the least developed countries.

10. With regard to the meeting of multilateral and bilateral financial and technical assistance institutions with representatives of the least developed countries, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD had taken note of the decision of the present Board, and of the statement by its President.

11. Referring to the offer of $500,000 made by the President of the Philippines, he said that the secretariat had held preliminary consultations and correspondence with the Philippines mission and proposed to send two senior staff members to Manila to discuss with the authorities concerned and training institutions in the Philippines the possibility of using the funds to organize training courses or seminars on foreign trade policy and planning for officials from the least developed countries and to work out arrangements for cooperation between the Government of the Philippines and UNCTAD.

12. Mr. ONG (Philippines) said he hoped that the UNCTAD officials visiting Manila would bring with them specific requests from the least developed countries concerning their needs.

13. The PRESIDENT recalled that at its 472nd meeting the Board had taken a decision, proposed by Yugoslavia, requesting that all appropriate measures be taken for the implementation of resolution 98 (IV). He therefore declared the discussion of agenda item 6 (c) closed.

INSTITUTIONAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED MATTERS (agenda item 7) (continued)

(f) REVIEW OF THE CALENDAR OF MEETINGS (TD/B/L.475 and Add.1 and 2)

14. Mr. BERTHOUD (Director, Division for Conference Affairs and External Relations) said that documents TD/B/L.475 and Add.1 listed all the changes made to the calendar approved by the Board at the first part of its sixteenth session which would seem to be required as a result of decisions or recommendations by various bodies that had met recently.

15. The financial implications (TD/B/L.475/Add.2) showed that no additional resources were required for 1977 and that it was not at present considered necessary to revise the budget estimates for the biennium 1978-1979 as far as the calendar was concerned.

16. On the other hand, the following changes should be made in the calendar: in footnote e/ on page 4 of document TD/B/L.475 Annex I, the dates of two of these meetings listed had been changed because the fifth session of the Conference on the Law of the Sea was to be reconvened in Geneva in 1978. Accordingly, the Working Party on trade expansion and regional economic integration among developing countries would meet from 10 to 18 April instead of from 28 March to 5 April. The Expert Group to study improvements in the financing of the fleet development of developing countries would meet from 24 to 28 April instead of from 17 to 21 April.

17. In the calendar for 1979 (Annex I, p. 5), UNCTAD's pre-conference meeting would be held on 3-4 May instead of 7-8 May, and its fifth session from 7 May to 1 June instead of from 9 May to 1 June. As indicated in paragraph 5 of document TD/B/L.475, the Board was expected to determine the duration of the second (ministerial) part of its ninth special session and of a further intergovernmental Group of Experts on the external Indebtedness of Developing Countries at the first part of its ninth special session.

18. If all the meetings currently scheduled for 1977 took place, UNCTAD would have held 66 sessions of different bodies, totalling 90½ weeks of meetings - as compared with 38 sessions and 50½ weeks in 1976. The calendar for 1978 contained a possible 101 weeks of meetings, which would increase to 113 weeks if conferences were required in 1978 to renegotiate the International Agreements on wheat and cocoa.

19. In conclusion, he indicated that there was hardly need to insist on the burden that such a calendar would represent, from the point of view of having documentation ready in good time, as well as generally, for both delegations and the secretariat.

20. Mr. FALASE (Nigeria) expressed the hope that the two meetings requested in resolution 98 (IV) (TD/217, paras. 35 and 36) could be held as early as possible in 1978.

21. After a short discussion between Mr. TALLEN (Nigeria) and Mr. BERTHOUD (Secretariat), the PRESIDENT said that the schedule for those meetings was subject to consultations with the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and that due account would be taken of the Nigerian representative's observations.

22. Mr. ANTONESCU (Romania) reminded the Board that the meeting of the Committee on Transfer of Technology scheduled for 26 June - 7 July 1978 (TD/B/L.475, Annex I, page 3) coincided with a regional meeting for Europe in Bucharest to prepare a Conference on science and technology.

23. Mr. BERTHOUD (Director, Division for Conference Affairs and External Relations) assured the Romanian representative that the secretariat was aware of the conflict of dates and would do everything possible to avoid it.

24. Mr. PANKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) pointed out that in a number of cases meetings had been scheduled too early, so that there had been insufficient time for adequate preparation. He hoped that the Secretary-General's consultations would lead to a reduction rather than an increase in the number of meetings.

25. The PRESIDENT suggested that the Board approve the calendar of meetings for 1977 and 1978 and the tentative schedule for 1979 as it appeared in documents TD/B/L.475 and Add.1 and 2, taking into account the additional information provided by the secretariat.

26. It was so decided.

(c) REVISION OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE BOARD AND ITS MAIN COMMITTEES (TD/B/L.461 and L.474) (continued)

27. The PRESIDENT said that at its previous meeting the Board had disposed of one section of the item by adopting a decision (TD/B/L.461) regarding the drafting of a single set of rules of procedure for all main committees of the Board. He drew attention to document TD/B/L.474 and invited the Board to take a decision on the amendment of rules 20 and 70 of its rules of procedure.

28. After consulting the regional co-ordinators, he suggested that rule 20 should read as follows: "The President, the Vice-Presidents and the Rapporteur shall hold office until their successors are elected. None of them may hold office if the member of the Conference of which he is a representative ceases to be a member of the Board."

29. He further suggested that, as indicated in document TD/B/L.474, the Board should authorize the secretariat, in the light of any decision on the question of summary records of public plenary meetings to be taken by the General Assembly, to amend rule 70 of its rules of procedure accordingly.

30. It was so decided.

(h) RATIONALIZATION OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE PERMANENT MACHINERY OF UNCTAD (TD/B/L.483)

31. The PRESIDENT suggested that the Board adopt the draft decision on the subject (TD/B/L.483), which represented the consensus of all the Groups and China on the question of the meetings of the Working Party on the UNCTAD programme budget and the medium-term plan.

32. It was so decided.

TRADE RELATIONS AMONG COUNTRIES HAVING DIFFERENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS (Agenda item 3) (continued)

REPORT OF SESSIONAL COMMITTEE II (TD/B/(XVII)/SC.II/L.1 and TD/B/L.482)

33. Mr. OSMAN (Somalia), Chairman of Sessional Committee II, said that in examining the question of economic and trade relations among countries having different economic and social systems, and in particular relations between the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the developing countries, Sessional Committee II had devoted particular attention to future trends. The participating UNCTAD member countries had expressed their readiness to participate in the meetings of the two intergovernmental groups of experts to be convened in the autumn of 1977.

34. Although the problems discussed by Sessional Committee II were complex and could be solved only gradually and with patience, there had been progress in several areas which gave grounds for optimism and some satisfaction. He emphasized the results achieved in bilateral consultations held during the Board's present session between developing countries and socialist countries of Eastern Europe, in accordance with Conference resolution 95 (IV). The consultations held within UNCTAD, hitherto largely a means of establishing contacts and exchanging views and experience on mutual trade and economic relations, were now becoming an effective instrument for negotiation. As far as possible, participating countries had sent experts, who were discussing ways and means of promoting bilateral trade relations and solving problems of mutual relations in broader fields such as credits, payments, legal and institutional frameworks and, in some cases, problems of specific export and import products. The substantive results were reflected in the Committee's report.

35. Mr. CHAO Kung-ta (China) said that his delegation had not participated in the work of Sessional Committee II, and wished to reserve its position on the Committee's report.

36. The PRESIDENT took note of the Chinese delegation's reservation. He proposed that the Board should formally adopt the report of Sessional Committee II as an integral part of the report of the Trade and Development Board on the first part of its seventeenth session.

37. It was so agreed.

38. The PRESIDENT said that the Board had thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 3.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.